



Statement of Anticipated Evidence: Marco Van Huigenbos

Commission Counsel anticipate that Mr. Van Huigenbos will provide the following evidence if he is called as a witness at the public hearings:

Background

- Mr. Van Huigenbos is originally from Holland. He has lived in Alberta since 1996.
- Mr. Van Huigenbos is a councilor on Fort Macleod's town council. He became an unofficial spokesperson for the Coutts protest.

Origins of the Protest: January 29 and 30, 2022

- The Coutts protest commenced as a slow roll convoy on January 29, 2022. Mr. Van Huigenbos joined on that day.
- The slow roll convoy participants included individuals from different parts of Alberta. They gathered in different communities, including Fort Mcleod, Vulcan and Lethbridge, and then drove to Coutts because it is a main commercial border point in Alberta.
- The slow roll convoy did not have designated leaders. The participants generally understood, through some social media posts, that the plan was to converge on the highway and drive down to Coutts. In Coutts, the convoy intended to turn around and head back up to Milk River, but the size of it was not anticipated and when they arrived in Coutts, they were unable to turn around due to traffic.
- The RCMP was on site when the slow roll convoy arrived.
- The slow roll became entrenched in Coutts in or around January 29 and 30, meaning that the vehicles that participated in the slow roll parked on the side of the highway and planned to stay.
- Three or four individuals became the unofficial spokespersons for the Coutts protesters. Mr. Van Huigenbos was the main unofficial spokesperson.
- Once the slow roll became a traffic jam and the vehicles were entrenched, the protesters self-regulated to ensure that the protest could continue peacefully. For example, there was an unwritten code of conduct that ensured compliance with traffic laws and prohibited other conduct, like public drinking.

Protest and Police Activity: January 31 to February 13, 2022

- On or around Monday, January 31, the RCMP began mobilizing in Coutts. Hotels in Lethbridge were booked up by officers, sheriff buses began arriving, and many officers started to gather north of Coutts.
- On or around Tuesday, February 1, the RCMP started enforcement efforts by knocking on the windows of vehicles parked at the tail end or the northern point of the Coutts protest, and asking the drivers to move their vehicles. They succeeded in getting some vehicles to move. The RCMP also put up a blockade on the



highway to prevent the Coutts protest from growing. The RCMP wanted to prevent individuals who had gathered in Milk River from joining the Coutts protesters.

- A second protest became entrenched in Milk River. This protest was much larger than the Coutts protest, particularly during the weekends. It was also less organized. There was no apparent leadership or structure. The Milk River protesters and the Coutts protesters were two different groups.
- At one point on or around February 1, individuals broke through the RCMP blockade. The RCMP responded by reinforcing the blockade with buses and barricades.
- On or around the same day, the RCMP's enforcement approach caused the protest to escalate, and the protesters and RCMP officers had a stand-off, meaning that the officers attempted enforcement while the protesters stood in a line some distance away.
- The stand-off ended after the RCMP officers ceased their enforcement efforts and there was a meeting at the Smugglers Saloon in Coutts between two Sergeants from the Airdrie RCMP, Sergeants Tulloch and Switzer, and the protesters. There were side discussions between the RCMP Sergeants and Mr. Van Huigenbos, where they established a line of communication to ensure safety and prevent any escalation on either side. Mr. Van Huigenbos was designated as the main point of contact for the RCMP Sergeants.
- This line of communication was largely successful: protesters were able to negotiate with the RCMP to organize the movement of trucks off the highway, which opened lanes of the highway for traffic coming to and from the port of entry, cattle, emergency and other vehicles. The protesters also ensured that emergency vehicles had access to and from Coutts. However, there was one event that occurred on or around February 12, where an accidental breakdown in communication lead to the RCMP disabling and damaging three excavators that the Coutts protesters had erected to fly flags.

The Protest Ends: February 14 and 15, 2022

- The Coutts protest remained peaceful. Negotiations with the RCMP continued until February 13.
- At approximately 7:45 pm on February 13, the RCMP tactical unit arrived in and around Smugglers Saloon due to what Mr. Van Huigenbos believes was an incorrectly perceived risk assessment when some of the tractors and vehicles were turned on to ensure they were still operational, and some were moved. The RCMP executed search warrants at approximately 11:00 p.m. at a house in the Two of Coutts. This operation continued into the early hours of February 14.
- On February 15, the Coutts protesters dispersed and the RCMP cleared out the area.



Relationships with Other Protesters

- Mr. Van Huigenbos was not part of a bigger group or political/ideological organization. He participated to protest against the COVID-19 public health measures implemented by the Government of Alberta and the Federal Government, which impacted his business and his family. He also participated to protest against the lack of engagement by Government of Alberta officials with their constituents throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.
- The other spokespersons and participants were similarly not part of a bigger group or political/ideological organization. They participated in the protest because of the impact that the COVID-19 public health measures had on their lives and livelihoods, and the lack of engagement by government officials.
- Many of the spokespersons and participants did not know each other prior to the protest.
- The Coutts protesters had no connection with other protests occurring in Canada.
- The Coutts protest was not organized in tandem with or through any other protest groups.

Funding and Donations

- Mr. Van Huigenbos was not actively involved in fundraising. The Coutts protesters received mostly donations in the form of fuel and food. They also received some monetary donations, potentially through crowdfunding and also through a donation jar at the Smugglers Saloon, from Canadians who supported the Freedom convoy. These donations were used for fuel and to rent the Smugglers Saloon.

Social Media

- The Coutts protesters communicated primarily in person and messaging apps, such as Telegram and Whatsapp.

Engagement from the Government of Alberta

- Government of Alberta officials did not open lines of communication with the protesters.
- The Coutts protest could have been dispersed if Government of Alberta officials would have opened lines of communications and/or agreed to negotiate and sit down with the spokespersons and participants.